



Kate Edmundson  
Interim Executive Director

# LOS ANGELES COUNTY COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

**COMMISSIONERS:**  
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SANDRA RUDNICK, VICE CHAIR  
ADELINA SORKIN, LCSW/ACSW, VICE CHAIR  
DR. HARRIETTE F. WILLIAMS

## APPROVED MINUTES

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The General Meeting of the Commission for Children and Families was held on Monday, **December 18, 2006**, in room 739 of the Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration, 500 West Temple Street, Los Angeles. **Please note that these minutes are intended as a summary and not as a verbatim transcription of events at this meeting.**

### COMMISSIONERS PRESENT (Quorum Established)

Carol O. Biondi  
Ann E. Franzen  
Susan F. Friedman  
Helen A. Kleinberg  
Dr. La-Doris McClaney  
Rev. Cecil L. Murray  
Wendy L. Ramallo  
Sandra Rudnick  
Adelina Sorkin  
Dr. Harriette F. Williams

### COMMISSIONERS ABSENT (Excused/Unexcused)

Patricia Curry  
Hon. Joyce Fahey  
Daisy Ma

### APPROVAL OF AGENDA

The agenda for the December 18, 2006, meeting was unanimously approved.

### APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the December 4, 2006, general meeting were unanimously approved.

### CHAIR'S REPORT

- Chair Kleinberg introduced incoming executive director Kimberly Foster, who accepted the position just prior to the meeting. Chair Kleinberg thanked the Executive Office and all Commissioners involved with the screening and interview processes.

- Following this morning's meeting, Commissioners will adjourn to the annual holiday luncheon, this year at the Homegirl Café, a subsidiary of Father Greg Boyle's Homeboy Industries. The event will be held courtesy of Commissioner Biondi, whom Chair Kleinberg thanked.
- Chair Kleinberg also expressed appreciation to the Department of Children and Family Services for all its good work during 2006, saying that Commissioners looked forward to its anticipated progress in 2007.

## **DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

- In the absence of director Trish Ploehn, Susan Kerr reported that a revised financial analysis of the county's Title IV-E waiver plan had been submitted to the state last week, and that difficulties appear to have been resolved. At present, \$74 million in flexible funding is being projected for DCFS and Probation over the five years of the waiver, a figure considerably less than initial estimates for a number of reasons:
  - The state's funding offer is based on average costs that were incurred during three years in which DCFS experienced decreases in case costs.
  - The Federal funding piece allows for 2 percent growth, while the state's does not.
  - The Board of Supervisors approved substantial salary and benefits increases last fall that were not included in the initial waiver context.

Although the department has overspent its assistance budget this year, it projects a 2 percent savings next year, followed by 4 percent the following year and 5 percent for each of the two years thereafter, which should provide additional savings. Also, waiver projections are based on budgeted staffing even though it is extremely unusual for all positions to be filled; perhaps \$15 million may be expected in salary savings.

The Probation Department is not assuming any assistance cost savings, even though Commissioner Biondi hopes that the waiver plan will compel staff to use suitable placement options prior to incarcerating youth. Weekly meetings are scheduled with Probation and with the Chief Administrative Office, and Ms. Kerr believes Probation is genuinely interested in positive outcomes and different ways of doing business.

After a start date of April 1, 2007, the department will evaluate waiver implementation efforts from month to month; either side may end the waiver with six months' notice. Some Commissioners expressed concerns that the department is undertaking too much for too little return, while Commissioner Ramallo reminded attendees that no jurisdictions have shown the level of savings originally hoped for (\$250 million or thereabouts), and that those doing a competent job generated savings through contracting out employees, flexibility that Los Angeles County does not have.

- On the program side, the revised draft of the waiver implementation plan will go before the Board of Supervisors on January 30. Discussions will take place tomorrow with representatives from the Association of Community Human Services Agencies

regarding funding language for contracting agencies, and Ms. Kerr offered to present the latest plan draft at the Commission's January 8 meeting.

- The court has ordered a revised Katie A. plan to be filed by March 27, 2007, and DCFS is working with Probation and the Department of Mental Health to develop one that will satisfy the court. The department has already committed to provide 300 therapeutic foster care slots by January 1, 2008, and another 500 wraparound slots by June 30, 2007. These will be funded in part by MacLaren Children's Center funds, although those may not be adequate. The department is studying the use of the MacLaren designation with an eye to possible reallocation.

With regard to the definition of the children served under the Katie A. settlement, Ms. Kerr explained that DCFS's October 2005 plan focused on a narrow population, an approach devised by former director David Sanders that the court did not accept. A work group—including Jackie Acosta, Dr. Charles Sophy, Sandra Thomas (the new DMH deputy director over juvenile justice), Greg Lecklitner, and representatives from the Probation Department and County Counsel—is formulating a description of the target population that will agree with the broader definition required by the judge's instructions. (Probation was not included in the original Katie A. settlement, but because DCFS children often continue to need resources after their cases transfer to Probation, it is now.)

- The department's budget request for 2007–2008 is due to the Chief Administrative Office by January 18, 2007. Ms. Kerr said it has been a challenge to present a budget that does not contain reductions due to the recently approved salary and cost-of-living increases. In addition, costs are passed on from certain ancillary departments, e.g., the Auditor-Controller's Office, the Chief Administrative Office, the Internal Services Department, and others. The budget team is currently analyzing the services those departments provide to see if any can be eliminated.
- Ms. Kerr distributed a sibling placement report taken off the CWS/CMS computer system as of November 2006; she will be happy to provide regular updates to this list. Counts range from 2,879 families of two siblings to 13 families of eight siblings, three families of nine siblings, and one family of ten siblings. Licensed foster homes often have limits to the numbers of children they can accept, so larger families may need to look to relatives if they wish to be placed together. In some circumstances, large sibling groups may not know each other well or ever have lived in a single family home.

## COMMITTEE UPDATES

- Vice Chair Rudnick reported that the **prevention committee** has recently met with stakeholders and children's deputies to make additional changes to the draft prevention plan. A full deputies' meeting will be scheduled before the plan is submitted to the Board of Supervisors for approval. She and Angela Carter have also met with the

head of a vocational school, and will visit additional facilities and report back to the Commission with further information.

- The **family reunification committee**, co-chaired by Lisa Parrish and Chair Kleinberg, has reviewed a drug and alcohol report based on structured decision-making, and will continue conversations on that topic next year. One difficulty is pinpointing the number of families affected by substance abuse issues, since no formal mechanisms exist within the team decision-making tool to collect that information. The committee would like to establish a system to do so, since much money is spent testing family members but not much is spent on treatment. The Title IV-E waiver plan's up-front assessments will include an examination of drug and alcohol use and domestic violence issues, but it's not yet clear how those specialized needs will trigger analyses from the multi-disciplinary assessment teams (MATs) that evaluate families within 30 days of detainment. In general, how the priorities of the Title IV-E waiver plan fit in with the work of all Commission committees continues to be of concern.
- The **Los Angeles Mentoring Model** group, under the aegis of the Inter-Agency Council for Child Abuse and Neglect, is attempting to establish oversight for all county-linked mentoring programs and develop a model that will enhance fundraising in both the public and private sectors. DCFS has a \$2.5 million allocation to contract with mentoring agencies, but private dollars can augment those efforts. Training is imperative, since many fine programs have little experience with foster children, for whom a good match with a committed, long-term mentor is important because of the losses they've already sustained in their lives. Commissioner Ramallo suggested a separate capacity-building contract that would pay a core group of experienced organizations to train other agencies and bring them into the fold. Ms. Kerr said the department would consider that.

### **CHILD AND FAMILY RESEARCH CONSORTIUM**

Dr. Jacquelyn McCroskey presented information on the Children and Families Research Consortium (CFRC), a partnership between DCFS and the Inter-University Consortium—the graduate social work programs at Cal State Long Beach, Cal State Los Angeles, Cal State Northridge, UCLA, and USC. In December 2005, the Board of Supervisors approved a one-year contract with this group to help DCFS analyze the huge amounts of data it gathers—particularly with regard to the numerous performance-measure initiatives in play within the department—and translate that into feedback to be used for training, quality improvement, planning, and further evaluation. An additional three-year contract is now being negotiated with the CFRC, which consists of a small team (Dr. McCroskey and four other part-time individuals) attempting to bridge the gap between high research ideals and their practical application within a public agency.

The CFRC's research advisory committee consists of key people involved in child welfare in Los Angeles County, including representatives from the courts, advocacy groups, universities, the Commission itself, First 5 LA, the Children's Planning Council, and the

Association of Community Human Services Agencies. Part of the group's charge is to discover what research has already been done and to post synopses of those projects on its website, so that social workers and others will have ready access. In addition, the committee awarded eight small grants to university-based researchers for projects now complete; Dr. McCroskey promised summary reports to Commissioners.

Active discussions have occurred about recruiting within universities for DCFS, Probation, and Mental Health positions, and changing curriculum requirements in some venues to promote less of a military/police approach, and more of a social-work emphasis, for staff hired into the juvenile justice system. Commissioner Williams asked if any distinctions had been discerned between employees educated through programs aligned with departmental policies and those having earned standard bachelors degrees, particularly in terms of attrition rates. Dr. McCroskey agreed that the question was important, but that data was lacking. A considerable difference has been observed over the last five years, however, in how DCFS regional administrators value and apply data in their offices.

Data is used on several levels. One is performance measurement—the key indicators that are reported to the Federal and state governments, or are used as part of the county's Performance Counts Initiative. A second level is the evaluation of individual programs, to see if resources are being used effectively. In this regard, understanding how programmatic responsibilities spread across bureaus and directors is key. Though it would require hiring additional staff, the CFRC hopes to build into its next grant the oversight of evaluations for family preservation (now ongoing), family support (for which an evaluation is optional), and wraparound, which is not being evaluated at all. One tool that would be particularly helpful is a matrix of the 176 agencies contracting with DCFS, at least half of which have more than one contract. The accountability aspects of those agreements are of concern, as is planning for the future to determine which agencies are best at doing what. Large organizations with multiple contracts often shift pots of money or subcontract with other agencies to meet diverse client requirements (as with the family preservation networks), but capacity-building efforts might also help smaller organizations serve areas of high need. Speeding up the move to performance-based contracting, too, will aid in identifying top-quality agencies. Community-based partnerships are essential for DCFS to do its work well, and they are not being managed as effectively as they might be. (The Probation Department has more serious issues, Commissioner Biondi said, with community providers often ignoring its RFPs because they contain conditions impossible to comply with. Probation receives \$32 million from the Juvenile Justice Crime Prevention Act, yet only about \$8 million of that goes to community agencies.)

Chair Kleinberg expressed her sense that the client's point of view is being neglected in contracting matters, and asked how DCFS can ensure that its approach serves the client best, rather than simply being easiest for the bureaucracy.

The CFRC's evaluation of the point of engagement initiative began last May in the Compton and Wateridge offices, and has laid the groundwork for the long-term, continuous assessment of the program. Focus groups and interviews with front-line workers and

community partners identified the most valuable data to collect from them and from the families being served. The next step will be to develop and validate questionnaires for all three groups that can be implemented as point of engagement continues to roll out.

Although the original vision was that point of engagement would function the same way in all offices, it actually gets implemented quite differently in each location, depending on the resources available or the institutional culture in place. As a philosophy or collection of ideas, rather than a program with a specific set of steps, it changes the way workers behave with clients, with each other, and with the community at large. Emergency response staff and dependency investigators in particular report how different from previous practice the listening approach is, with its emphasis on hearing what's going on in families' lives and providing what they need, even if it's help making the rent or getting food in the refrigerator. "When you know you have something to offer these families," one said, "it changes the questions you ask."

Beyond the performance measures now in place, but the CFRC is recommending three ways in which to gather qualitative data and help workers gain a greater understanding of the resources that may be available to them:

- Regular reviews of a random sample of case files
- Surveys of families, front-line workers, and community partners, to be analyzed by researchers
- Information on communities produced by entities other than DCFS, such as Healthy City and First 5 LA

Dr. McCroskey promised Ms. Kerr a list of links to these last resources, which should be of help to the community advisory groups attached to the regional offices, supplementing the Family to Family profiles already distributed. (Dr. McCroskey has also asked First 5 LA for a list of the 750 agencies it has funded in the county.) According to Marilyn Garrison, a website has been created for point of engagement staff with a link to Healthy City. By entering a ZIP Code, social workers can access community resources for domestic violence, mental health, and substance abuse issues, plus a link to the liaison for the Department of Public Social Services. Ms. Kerr said that she would publish a reminder to staff that these and other resources are available.

If an office determines that a particular need is supported by data, Vice Chair Sorkin asked, may it request a modification in its funding to address that need? Funding is allocated by caseload, not by office, but Ms. Kerr believes that might be a possibility.

Chair Kleinberg questioned the staffing, time, and training needed for proper data collection in each office, and how the evaluation component for the Title IV-E waiver implementation will be handled. The state Department of Social Services has retained Charles Ferguson from Sonoma State University, who also evaluated the wraparound waiver, Dr. McCroskey reported, and he has included three components in his evaluation budget: performance measures (those tracked by the University of California at Berkeley), a cost analysis, and a qualitative piece. He is interested in building on what has been learned

through the point of engagement evaluation, and the CFRC will make that report available to him and to Alameda County, which is also participating in the waiver.

Most universities are interested in outcomes and want to outreach to the community, Commissioner Williams said, and partnerships that could identify the right ways to do things in public service should be explored, with possible funding from a variety of sources. She suggested that a package be put together for the Board of Supervisors that would expand on what the CFRC is doing.

Chair Kleinberg thanked Dr. McCroskey for her presentation, and asked her to return with further information from the CFRC at a later date.

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

There was no public comment.

**MEETING ADJOURNED**